



JANET T. MILLS
GOVERNOR

STATE OF MAINE
DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, CONSERVATION & FORESTRY
OFFICE OF THE COMMISSIONER
22 STATE HOUSE STATION
AUGUSTA, MAINE 04333

AMANDA E. BEAL
COMMISSIONER

TESTIMONY BEFORE THE JOINT COMMITTEE ON
APPROPRIATIONS AND FINANCIAL AFFAIRS

Neither For Nor Against LD 1885

"An Act to Authorize a General Fund Bond Issue to Repair or Replace Bureau of Forestry Helicopters."

January 22, 2020

Senator, Breen, Representative Gattine, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs, I am Patty Cormier, Director of the Maine Forest Service, speaking on behalf of Amanda Beal, Commissioner of the Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry (DACF) and I am providing testimony Neither For Nor Against LD 1885, "An Act to Authorize a General Fund Bond Issue to Repair or Replace Bureau of Forestry Helicopters."

The Forest Protection Division operates a complex aviation fleet of both helicopters and airplanes in support of DACF and other state agencies. Five of the six helicopters we currently use to fight fire and perform search and rescue are over 50 years old. The average age of the three airplanes that we operate is 56 years old. While the aircraft are well maintained by our own aviation mechanics, there comes a time when the age of the aircraft interferes with the reliable and safe completion of the state's mission.

Our airplanes are used for fire detection flights, water quality enforcement, and entomology surveys to map the entire state for pest infestation. During the summer, the airplanes operate on wheels and floats while in the winter they are all on skis. The Maine Forest Service operates an effective and efficient flight division that benefits the entire state, but the older aircraft need to be replaced or modified to maintain that effectiveness. This isn't a new issue for the Forest Service and the Bureau began the process of updating the fleet in the early 2000's, but the process was delayed by the 2008 financial crisis after purchasing only one new helicopter. Thirteen years later, it is time to get back on track to modernize the fleet.

While we are supportive of the intent of this legislation, we recognize the many moving parts during the legislative session and are happy to work with the appropriations committee alongside the Governor's office to ensure that there are adequate resources available to update this important fleet of aircrafts. Additionally, our Chief Forest Ranger, Bill Hamilton, is here to provide testimony and to share more details about the Forest Protection Division and the services that we provide.

We are available to answer any questions the committee may have and will have staff present at the work session.

HARLOW BUILDING
18 ELKINS LANE
AUGUSTA, MAINE



PHONE: (207) 287-3200
FAX: (207) 287-2400
WEB: WWW.MAINE.GOV/DACF